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From: Bassler, Rachel
Sent: Tue 1/10/2017 5:56:20 PM
Subject: RE: East Chicago Press Clips 1/10/17

FYI, Chris's interview yesterday with the NWIT:

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/visclosky-updates-residents-on-east-chicago-lead-crisis/article_0413df7b-e94d-5f11-93c2-8a827b327be2.html

Visclosky updates residents on East Chicago lead crisis

EAST CHICAGO — U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Merrillville, said Monday he was unhappy with how EPA handled the release of information about lead found in drinking water at 18 of 43 homes in the USS Lead Superfund site.

The congressman told residents at a forum at City Hall the EPA failed to tell individual homeowners the cause of the high lead results in their water and the resources available to them.

The city's water filtration plants meet all federal and environmental standards, and they are not the source of the lead in residents' drinking water, Visclosky said.

Chris Korleski, EPA Region 5 water division director, said after the meeting that employees from the federal agency called each of the residents in early December about drinking water testing. EPA employees read from a prepared script, which stated it's likely a large percentage of service lines in East Chicago are made from lead.

"We thought that we were making it clear here that the issue was in the service lines or the home's plumbing," Korleski said.

Residents at each of the 43 homes tested were given water filters with instructions on how to maintain them, he said. EPA worked with the city and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management during the week residents were notified, and documents posted at the city's website state how lead gets into drinking water, he said.

The city recently announced EPA found high lead levels in water at some of the homes in the Superfund site as part of a pilot program to determine if excavation would cause lead to flake from service lines and enter the water supply. The high lead levels were found before excavation was started; EPA has not yet released results from post-excavation testing.

City officials have said the lead came from aging service lines, not the city filtration plants or water mains. East Chicago, like many cities in the United States, has many aging lead service lines.

City and EPA officials have said no additional water testing is planned.

IDEM advised the city in September to change its corrosion control blend to further prevent lead from leaching into the into customer service lines, documents show. The change will help protect all city residents, officials said.

Visclosky said he is working to designate a staff member in his office to work specifically with Superfund residents. His office is also researching funding to provide water filters to residents, he said.

"I cannot promise anything, but we will continue to work as hard as possible," he said.

Several residents asked if Visclosky would support a request for an emergency declaration to bring in additional funding to deal with the crisis.

The congressman said Mayor Anthony Copeland submitted a request for a declaration to the governor's office, and residents will need to inquire in Indianapolis about its status.

Visclosky also reiterated that he and other elected federal officials are seeking funding for demolition of the West Calumet Housing Complex while simultaneously working on identifying funding to help its more than 1,000 residents relocate. About one-third of the families at the complex have moved, he said.

Lead and arsenic contamination in the soil at the complex in some cases was found to be more than 200 times the EPA's allowable limit for residential use. The complex is located in one of three residential cleanup zones in the USS Lead Superfund site, which includes the entire Calumet neighborhood and the USS Lead factory site off Kennedy Avenue.

The EPA began cleanup in the middle and eastern parts of the neighborhood last summer

but suspended work for the winter. Lead in the soil is not related to lead in the drinking water, officials said.

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East Chicago press clips

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Politicians voice support for East Chicago disaster relief

St. Stanislaus 8th grader Alejandra Castellanos listens as Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Merrillville, comments on her introduction. (Jim Karczewski / Post-Tribune)

Northwest Indiana politicians are urging the state to grant a disaster declaration for East Chicago.

U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Merrillville, on Monday at a town forum at East Chicago City Hall, pledged to support the city's request to former Gov. Mike Pence and Gov. Eric Holcomb requesting a disaster declaration to leverage resources to deal with lead contamination in the Calumet neighborhood, and state Sen. Frank Mrvan submitted a bill giving the city \$2.5 million in relief funds.

"I am delighted to support the city's request," Visclosky said.

What he was not as pleased about is the work of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Visclosky said he's continued to push the EPA to take action in the contaminated neighborhoods, especially in light of water testing results that found elevated levels of lead in residents' drinking water.

The EPA monitored water quality of the eastern zones of the U.S.S. Lead Superfund site during remediation work in the neighborhood, and found that 18 of the 43 homes where the water was tested exceeded 15 parts per billion of lead – the EPA's threshold for water safety.

"I am very, very unhappy with the Environmental Protection Agency and how they have handled that issue," Visclosky said.

The congressman said he's asked the EPA to look into what's the cause of the lead in the water and find resources to take corrective action, and offer testing to the neighbors of people whose water testing positive for contaminants.

The Rev. Cheryl Rivera, executive director of the Northwest Indiana Federation of Interfaith Organizations and associate pastor of the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in East Chicago, said the community needs support to put pressure on state and federal officials to approve the disaster declaration.

"We need that done immediately," Rivera said.

The city submitted its request for a disaster declaration in December.

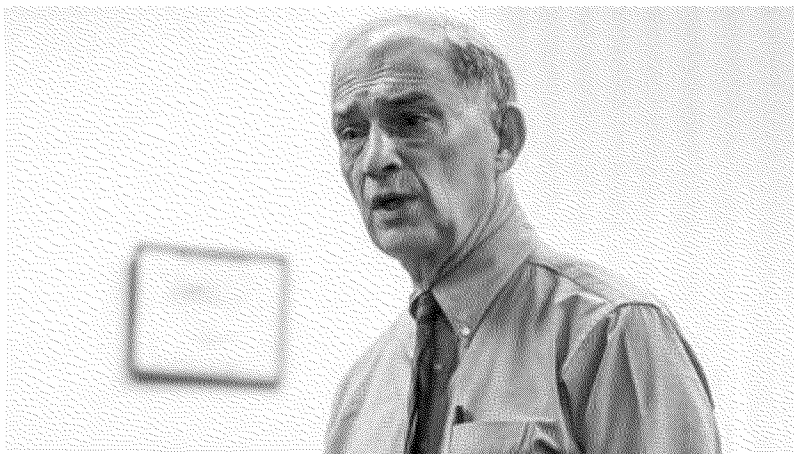
"The residents of my city, my staff, other local officials and I have been laboring under conditions which are not of our making, but which cry out for help," Mayor Anthony Copeland wrote to Pence on Dec. 1.

Copeland noted, in the letter, that Indiana code defined a disaster as "being an occurrence or imminent threat of widespread severe damage, injury, loss of life or property damage from a utility failure, public health emergency, blight or other public calamity."

The resources of East Chicago are strained to the "point of breaking," Copeland wrote, and resources from the state are needed to adequately respond to the continuing crisis.

Mrvan's bill, which was sent to the Appropriations Committee for review, would take money from the Department of Homeland Security and disburse it to eligible agencies dealing with lead and arsenic contamination in East Chicago. Should the bill pass, \$2.5 million would be available to the city during the next two budget years.

Mrvan was unavailable for comment Monday.



Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Merrillville, discusses the current state of the first district and the 115th Congress. (Jim Karczewski / Post-Tribune)

While a final ruling on the disaster declaration is pending, Visclosky said he remains in contact with the EPA, Department of Housing and Urban Development and city.

"We are doing everything we can," Visclosky said.

Visclosky said he's met with HUD Secretary Julian Castro and talked about ensuring resources are available for the residents of the West Calumet Housing Complex who

are relocating and finding money for the demolition of the complex once it's vacant.

There are pots of money available, Visclosky said, but those are targeted for specific programs. East Chicago has applied for other federal dollars, he said, but those are competitive programs.

City attorney Carla Morgan said given the tone of the incoming administration's tenor of less regulation, what it might mean for cleanup projects like the one in East Chicago is a matter for speculation.

"I am very concerned what the new administration may want to do with EPA," Visclosky said.

No Pilsen, American Lead articles.